THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

NORMAN MACLEOD CAIE

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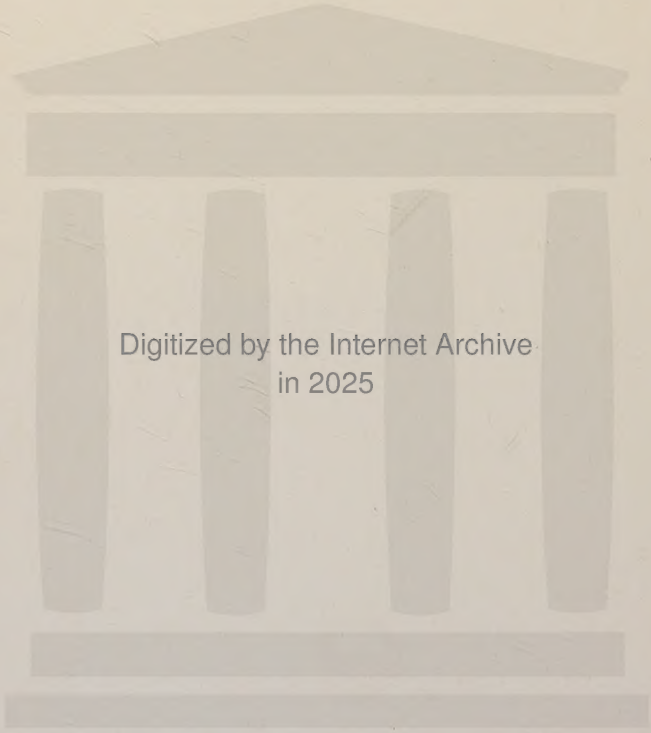
REV. NORMAN MACLEOD CAIE, B.D.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THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

BY

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Sin
(Title)

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I: PRIDE

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

I: PRIDE

"TELL them, man, about their sins!" It was the incisive remark of a venerable preacher to one who had just delivered in his hearing an elegant pulpit prelection. And as we advance in Christian experience, we feel it increasingly needful to obtain clear views of the special sins against which we are summoned to contend. An invisible enemy with smokeless powder will make very brave men quail. It was indeed an omen of good hope when the Psalmist could exclaim: "This is my infirmity," placing his finger decisively upon his own most vulnerable spot.

Such a feeling doubtless led many old writers to the task of singling out the most

insidious sins which war against the soul. In the course of debate, seven were gradually agreed upon, as the subtlest and worst; and the treatment of these sins—the Seven Deadly Sins, as they came to be called—was a favourite theme in mediæval theology. To this theme also, Dante devotes his "Purgatorio." The subject has scarcely been touched by Protestant writers, but it will still repay careful consideration. At the outset, the general plan of the "Purgatorio" may be briefly described. Dante represents his pilgrims as being purged from their deadly sins, through the gradual and painful ascent of a mountain, with the Garden of Paradise upon its crest. The mountain originated thus. When Satan fell from heaven, he struck the southern side of the earth. The land whereon he fell, fled to the other hemisphere, and the soil displaced as he tore his way to hell, through the centre

of the earth, was flung up behind him by the shock, and formed this mountain. It is a fine conception. The fall of Satan threw up a pathway back to Paradise lost. The Garden might be regained.

> There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
> Would men observingly distil it out.

Two advantages resulted from Dante's scheme. First, he could arrange the Seven Deadly Sins in terraces on the mountain side, at their respective distances from Paradise. Second, he could give the entire purifying process an aspect of brightness and hope, in sharp contrast to the "Inferno," with its dread inscription above the gate: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here." Dante's pilgrims in the "Purgatorio" were prisoners; but they were "prisoners of hope."

The sin which Dante and all other me-

diæval writers agree upon as fundamental is Pride. At the first blush, this may seem surprising, and it might be thought that other evil motions of the human spirit might have taken precedence of it. Upon reflection, however, the arrangement will be found to accord with Scripture and to commend itself to our ethical sense. Our first parents erred through pride. To the temptation: "Ye shall be as gods," they succumbed. Nay, "by that sin fell the angels." "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven," Milton makes his Satan say. And when we review the matter, we see that the essence of every sin lies in pride; for the soul of pride is the setting up of self against all other selves, even against God. "Pride," said St. Thomas Aquinas, "is the most grievous of all sins, because it exceeds them all in that turning away from God, which is the crowning constituent of all sin."

Pride, however, is to be carefully distinguished from a proper Christian self-respect. Beneath a forbidding exterior and many eccentricities of dress the Puritans had such nobility of nature that they created the finest army in Europe and set their feet upon the necks of kings. Beneath a superficial sternness, the Calvinists had such a "haughtiness of soul" that they made the Scots character reverenced and feared throughout the world. The Puritans and Calvinists were the embodiment of self-respect. But we should not call them proud. Would that we had more of their independence and stalwart force to-day! Let us trust the merit of our own personality. Everything vibrates to that iron string.

> Loss is no shame, nor to be less than foe,
> But to be lesser than thyself.

The self-respecting man demands recognition for merit which he *has;* the proud

man demands recognition for merit which he has *not*. The king of a petty tribe stalking each morning from his hovel, bidding the sun good morrow, and pointing its course for the day, embodies what is meant. The proud man arrogates to himself wholly imaginary powers; he despises those of others; and he will even dictate to God. At the outset of the recent war, the world was called to witness an appalling instance of such pride. There was a time when the ex-Emperor of Germany was regarded by other peoples as a strong and not unfriendly monarch; but in the early stages of the war, he stood convicted of the first of the Seven Deadly Sins. His words left the matter in no doubt: "On me as German Emperor the Spirit of God has descended. I am His weapon, His sword, His vicegerent. Woe to the disobedient! Death to cowards and traitors!" Surely the comment of a leading

journal was amply justified: "We have been accustomed to look on such utterances as more or less innoxious flummery; but we know better now, when we have seen the mad dog rush open-mouthed into the crowd." It recalled Napoleon, who cried: "There shall be no God." God said: "There shall be no Napoleon." And God always has the last word.

In everyday life the sin of pride appears in many forms. "Few," it has been remarked, "have the steadiness of head and hand to carry a full cup, especially if it has been suddenly filled." Material prosperity, though far from being an evil in itself, is apt to engender very insidious kinds of pride. The wheels of a carriage may be clogged and stopped by flowers; and it is by no means everyone who can say with St. Paul: "I know both how to be abased and I know how to *abound.*"

There is also pride of intellect. In classic paganism, this form of the sin meets us not infrequently. Horace scornfully declares: "I hate the vulgar crowd and keep them at arm's length"; and Aristotle in his *Ethics* conceives the sage as walking with a stately gait, speaking with an imperious voice, and looking down on all he meets. He wonders at nothing and considers nothing great, since he desires his own superiority to be universally recognised. Beside such a picture, this may well be set from Ruskin: "I believe that the first test of the truly great man is his humility. I do not mean by humility doubt of his own powers or hesitation to speak his own opinions. Arnolfo knows that he can build a good dome at Florence—Sir Isaac Newton knows that he has worked out a problem or two that would have puzzled any one else. Only they do not expect their fellow-men to fall down and worship

them. They have a curious under-sense of powerlessness, feeling that the greatness is not in them but through them, that they could not do or be anything else than God has made them." Yet overweening pride of intellect still lifts its head; and its climax has been achieved in that arrogant philosophy which Nietzsche taught pre-war Germany too well. That philosophy simply means: "Despise others and exalt yourself." And once again the proverb has been abundantly verified: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

Finally, there is pride in spiritual gifts and powers. In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, this "devil's darling sin" is pilloried forever; and nothing in literature is more magnificent than the way in which Jesus elsewhere lashes it. The reason is not far to seek. The Pharisee claimed a per-

fection which he did not possess, and he trusted not in another but in himself. He thanked God that he was not as other men. But the other men may have thanked God for that, also. This religious pride, thus pilloried by Christ, really closes the door against any possible salvation, and is accordingly the most fundamental of all the Seven Deadly Sins. The man who is confident about his health cannot be treated; the man who is confident about his wisdom cannot be taught; the man who is confident about his spiritual perfection cannot be redeemed.

On the first terrace of the purgatorial mountain, whereon Dante's pilgrims are being cleansed from pride, we see them walking over a marble pavement covered with sculptured figures, which preach to them mute sermons on the beauty of lowliness of mind. Many such pictures rise before our

imagination. Moses who wist not that his face shone, when God spake with him on the mount; the Virgin who knelt in self-abasement when she knew that the infant Jesus would be nursed in her arms; our Lord Himself, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be made rich. Can we be haughty for whom He became humble? Can we be proud before the Cross?

II: ENVY

II: ENVY

HAVING witnessed the cleansing of the "prisoners of hope" from the sin of pride, upon the lowest terrace of the purgatorial mountain, Dante, Virgil, and the pilgrim explorers climb through the stairway on to the second terrace—that upon which the victims of envy are being purified. Envy is the second of the Seven Deadly Sins. It should, of course, be carefully distinguished from legitimate and honourable ambition, as pride was distinguished from a right self-respect. Poor indeed is the man who has no honest spirit of ambition to "covet earnestly the best gifts."

> Aspire, break bounds,
> Endeavour to be good
> And better still and best!
> Success is nought,
> Endeavour's all!

Upon a monument to an Alpine guide who perished in a crevasse, are the simple words: "He died climbing." No worthier tribute could be paid to any soul at last. The Greek motto of the oldest Scottish University is, translated, "Always to be best"; and the words embody an entirely praiseworthy attitude to life. Without the sheer desire for excellence and something of that "divine dissatisfaction," which is the mainspring of progress in every sphere, character is sadly incomplete. When a noted physician declared: "After fifty years of study of the ghastly doings of the tubercle bacillus, I can honestly say that I would rather have the power to cause the tears shed on its account to cease than to be the greatest official or the greatest owner in the world," he uttered a legitimate and very noble aspiration. Our aim should always be, not the injuring but the blessing of

others, just by excelling them in lofty and philanthropic ways.

Envy, however, is a carping and ill-humoured attitude of spirit towards the excellence and success of our neighbour. St. Thomas Aquinas defined it as "sadness at another's good." It is displeasure and regret when some one else prospers better than we ourselves do. And it includes a certain unlovely satisfaction at the calamities by which another may be overtaken. "Few," said a brilliant French writer, "are able to suppress in themselves a secret pleasure over the misfortunes of their friends." A more petty and despicable spirit it is difficult to conceive. "Saul eyed David." He grieved at the stripling's progress, and flung his royal javelin at him twice. The same spirit, singularly contemptible in itself, has been responsible for some of the greatest catastrophes in history. If pride produced

man's first sin, envy caused his second. And countless crimes and persecutions have been inspired since then by the envy of evil men at those who were more spiritually-minded than themselves. Among nations envy has produced Jesuitical conspiracies and bloody wars; and one of the most potent causes of the recent world-wide war was the jealousy of one would-be foremost nation towards other peoples, who were believed to stand across the path of her ideals. Nay, our Lord Himself was delivered to the Cross by the envy of the priests and scribes. They saw that He was manifestly superseding them and breaking their spell. And they could not look upon His beauty without the Cain-spirit rankling in their hearts.

In everyday life, the sin of envy frequently appears. Time and again it has brought about the collapse of reforming and progressive movements. It drove Socrates

to drink the hemlock: it precipitated the persecution of Galilee: it expelled John Wesley from the Church in which he had been born: it mingled the blood of the Covenanters with the wine of the Sacrament on the mosshags and moors of Scotland. In more recent days, it powerfully helped to inflict upon Macleod Campbell and Robertson Smith ecclesiastical exile and broken hearts. It is not uncommon for men of vision to discover still that they cannot advocate some fresh aspect of truth without running the gauntlet of the same personal bitterness and envy. Let us be willing to have our views—and maybe ourselves—displaced by better measures and men, if such there be. In this way alone can we "buy the truth and sell it not."

The sin of envy has been called the sin of the strong, who often cannot bear that smaller folk should get any of the success

or praise which they consider to be due to themselves. History certainly contains instances of this insane craving on the part of outstanding personalities. Alexander the Great could not tolerate any praise being given to his generals, because he felt it so much subtracted from himself. But envy is in general the special sin, rather, of the weak. Such people, being beaten in the race of life, become consumed with jealousy and chagrin. Perhaps they have been neglectful of their opportunities; and when others, more industrious, step ahead, they give way to pique. "They wish to have my fortune," said a successful man concerning his detractors, "but why do they not wish to have my labours?" Envy is obvious in some people's conversation. Pliny remarked that Virgil was devoid of imagination, and certain Roman critics insinuated that Horace plagiarized from the Grecian poets. Dis-

paraging remarks of a similar kind are often astutely introduced into people's ordinary talk; and as "Saul eyed David," they scan each other's achievements with jealous foreboding or chagrin. The diary of the saintly Andrew Bonar has the following entry: "This day twenty years ago, I preached for the first time as an ordained minister. It is amazing that the Lord has spared me and used me at all. . . . Yet envy is my hurt, and to-day I have been seeking grace to rejoice exceedingly over the usefulness of others, even where it casts me into the shade. . . . Lord, give more and more to those brethren whom I have despised." This good man had been jealous of ministers seemingly more successful than himself. And if such a man was victimised by envy, every one should challenge like a sentry his own heart.

Envy is a sin of the eyes, the ears, and the

tongue; and in Dante's "Purgatorio," each of these is seen undergoing its appropriate discipline. Upon the wall of a chapel at Padua there is also a suggestive figure of Envy painted by Giotto, Dante's friend. The figure is given long ears to catch every breath of rumour and scandal which might hurt a neighbour, and a serpent tongue to poison his reputation. Then the tongue coils back to sting the eyes of the figure herself. This last detail conveys the deepest hint of all. Envy is blind. On the terrace of envy, Dante's pilgrims observe that the eyes of every penitent are sewn up with wire. But the coiling back of the serpent tongue to sting the figure's eyes suggests that envy is really blinded by herself. Jealousy regarding others inexorably reacts to embitter the heart out of which it comes.

Everywhere the light and shade
By the gazer's eye is made.

Envy

When the poems of Lord Byron first appeared, an anonymous reviewer enthusiastically praised them, and declared that in the presence of such products of genius, Sir Walter Scott could no longer be considered the leading poet of his day. It was afterwards discovered that the anonymous reviewer was Sir Walter himself! No finer instance of literary generosity exists. Instead of putting a spoke in Byron's wheel, after the manner of the lesser breed of critics, Scott frankly appreciated Byron's amazing powers. To school oneself to such an appreciation of others' merit in every sphere, and even though it may adversely affect one's own position, is the surest antidote to envy.

> He lost the game: no matter for that;
> He kept his temper and swung his hat.

Of this generosity towards excellence in

others, the supreme example is that of John the Baptist. To the banks of Jordan, St. John had drawn great multitudes by his preaching, and he had become the idol of the crowd. Then Jesus came; and the Baptist's popularity at once began to wane. To a man of his eager and impetuous type, the temptation to envy the Lamb of God whose advent he well knew must eclipse him, as the sunrise extinguishes the stars, must have been singularly fierce. Yet no shadow of jealousy falls across the Baptist's heart. Rather does he explicitly declare—in words which are apples of gold in pitchers of silver—"He must increase, but I must decrease."

III: ANGER

III: ANGER

WHEN Dante's pilgrims reached the third terrace upon the purgatorial mountain—that of Anger—they found themselves wrapped in a dense pall of smoke. The poet's idea evidently is that, as pride is mainly a sin of the eyes and envy a sin of the ears, anger is a sin of the imagination. The angry man sets his imagination revolving round some real or fancied wrong, until his vision becomes dimmed and clouded; as the prophet Balaam, "the man whose eyes had been opened," became so blinded by passion that he could not discern the angel, whom his own ass was trying to avoid.

At the outset, however, one must distin-

guish sinful anger from righteous indignation, as pride should be distinguished from honest self-respect, and envy from honourable ambition. In itself, anger is by no means a quality to be sweepingly condemned. Among St. Paul's ethical counsels to the Ephesian Christians, there is one which frankly says, "Be ye angry and sin not"; and Scripture elsewhere speaks of "the wrath of God," and even of "the wrath of the Lamb." St. Mark further records in our Lord's Galilean ministry an incident, during which He looked round about Him upon His auditors "with indignation." And what pictures of splendid wrath are those in which Jesus condemns the Pharisees and Scribes, overturns the tables of the money-changers in the Temple, and drives them out with the whip of cords! Certain critics have suggested that in these scenes our Lord was chargeable with excessive

anger; but in view of the palpable and flagrant wrongs which He was denouncing, one's sober judgment must rather bow before an indignation which is lofty and sublime.

Forty years ago, when others hedged, the late Mr. Gladstone went up and down through Britain vehemently denouncing the Bulgarian atrocities and the unspeakable Turks who perpetrated them. That was a right and worthy anger. And history will always record with justifiable pride the indignation called forth by the atrocities inflicted by militant Germany, at the outset of the recent war, upon the small and unoffending land of Belgium. Was it not permanently creditable to our chivalry that we were then so passionately ready to resist unprovoked aggression and to defend the weak?

It is fatally possible that character should

become too pliable and soft; but Christian perfection requires the edge of the moral sense to be kept sensitive and sharp. Even steel needs temper. "I will never believe," said Charles Kingsley, "that a man has any love for the good and beautiful, unless he denounces the evil and disgusting, the moment he sees it." And a recent writer declares: "There will be more and more need of great hatreds. . . . The Christian of the twentieth century will know how to feel contempt as well as admiration, and detestation as well as love." These are strong words, but not more so than those of the Psalmist: "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? . . . I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies." "Abhor that which is evil," said St. Paul; and in the original, the word "abhor" calls up the image of a hedgehog with its quills all out.

You have no enemies, you say.
Alas, my friend, the beast is poor.
He who has mingled in the fray
Of duty that the brave endure
Must have made foes! If you have none,
You've hit no traitor on the hip;
You've dashed no cup from perjured lip;
You've turned no wrong to right;
You've been a coward in the fight!

There is thus an anger which is right and noble. But this anger we must clearly distinguish from that which is sinful. In what respects then is anger to be held a sin? First, when it is expended in foolish and improper ways. There is a classical story of two youths, Augustus and Eugene, who had been alternately spinning a top. They fell to quarrelling about their turns, seized each other in a rage; and one pulled a sharp knife from his pocket, and stabbed and killed the other. One lad thus lost his life and the second became a murderer, merely to settle whose turn it was to spin a top.

People grow very angry over such senseless pretexts still. The vision of the prophet Balaam was so clouded by the fumes of his rage that he lost his perspective and took to belabouring his ass. A haughty ruler has fallen into a passion over some resistance to his unjust demands. A sulky boy becomes consumed by petulant rage over a reproof from his father, which drives him to run away from home and maybe spoil his whole career. "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

Further, anger is sinful when it finds expression in profane and reckless words. "I would there were a sword in mine hand," cried Balaam to his ass in the defile, "for then I would kill thee." And the weak-kneed prophet may have uttered other expletives which Scripture does not record. At all events, shocking are the words which we may still hear showered by angry carters

and drivers upon their innocent beasts of burden in the streets. No form of sinful anger is more loathsome and revolting than the oaths and curses which it so frequently inspires. In our domestic and social relationships too, what passionate words sometimes escape from angry tongues! A man can bear great losses—a woman can sacrifice her child—with Christian fortitude and resignation; but they are wrapped in clouds of indignation at the blunders of an employé or the careless breaking of a dish.

The truth is that all anger is sinful which causes us to lose our self-control. A poor cobbler at Leyden, who was accustomed to attend the public disputations at the Academy, was asked if he understood Latin. "No," he replied, "but I always know who is wrong in the argument." "How?" queried his questioner. "Why!" came the answer, "by noting who loses his temper first!"

Even when our wrath is legitimate, it is wrong to give expression to it in passionate and reckless ways. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." In other words, regulate and put the strictest limits upon your wrath. It is not needful to extinguish it wholly, provided its object be right and worthy. But get the whip hand of it. Check it by the curfew bell. This bell was originally rung each evening to bid all put out their candles and rake up their fires. The custom survives in the ringing of town and village bells at nine or ten o'clock throughout Scotland. Let anger be similarly confined. Let not the sun go down upon it. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

To subdue sinful anger, many expedients have been suggested. When in the fit of passion, let a person try to see himself as

others see him, and his violence will subside. A woman with a drunken husband resolved to reveal him to himself. She knew what he was, and so did the children—alas, too well! But he did not seem to grasp it. One night, when he returned home and sank to dishevelled slumber in his chair, she had him photographed, and laid the result next morning beside him at breakfast. The disclosure is said to have caused his reformation. And if the swollen features and excited eyes of the passionately angry man could be photographed for him to see in moments of calmness, the camera might do a moral service of much value. Such anger is not of the angel but of the brute.

Then there is the celebrated expedient of interposing some little space of silence between one's rising fury and its audible expression. It is told of Julius Cæsar that, when provoked, he would repeat the whole

Roman alphabet before uttering a word. And we have the old advice: When angry, count twenty ere you speak. It has been shrewdly suggested that God gave us two eyes but only one tongue, in order that we should *see* twice as much as we *say.*

Boys flying kites haul in their white-winged birds:
You can't do that way when you're flying words.
"Careful with fire" is good advice, we know;
"Careful with words" is ten times doubly so.
Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead,
But God Himself can't kill them when they're said!

But all such devices must be futile without the prayer which Dante heard chanted in unison upon the terrace of anger, as he and Virgil were departing—a prayer to the Lamb of God Who taketh away sin, for spiritual help and peace. St. Augustine, writing to a friend, beautifully says: "When the winds and waves of angry passion rush upon your soul, do what the disciples did

when the tempest fell upon them in the boat. Call to Christ." And nothing will calm sinful wrath like calling to and meditating upon Him "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

IV: SLOTH

IV: SLOTH

NIGHT was falling and the stars were peeping out as Dante's pilgrims climbed through the stairway to the fourth terrace upon the purgatorial mountain—that of Sloth. A silence which was oppressive brooded over all. The very moon moved more slowly than was her wont. Everything seemed infected with the lethargic spirit of the terrace. And Dante himself acknowledged that he felt like one who wanders half asleep. The sin of sloth was dwelt upon somewhat frequently by mediæval writers, and it was invariably discussed under its late Latin name, *Accidia.* This term hardly conveys the exact meaning which we attach to sloth, and a scholarly expositor of the "Purgatorio" defines it as

"the break-down of interest in the things which are worthy of a man's endeavour." To these things there had not been absolute indifference at first. The initial steps had been taken. But then the pursuit had slackened and the hands had been let down. A sentence in the Book of Proverbs expresses the connotation of *accidia* very well. "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting." An advantage had been gained; but energy and perseverance were lacking to follow it up.

Such paralysis of higher interest may be noted in many spheres, in our everyday life. There is the man who begins the first volume of some book, but before he is half way through, he tires; or who joins some lecture-course, but before he has attended half a dozen lectures, he tires. If he kept a diary —which is unlikely, considering the sort of man he is—it would present a melancholy

record of opportunities not improved. There is the youth who has enjoyed the advantage of an excellent modern education. He has acquired distinct business aptitude, and commercial or professional skill. The ball seems to be at his foot. He appears to be on the certain path to material success, intellectual eminence, and noble citizenship. But his hands unexpectedly relax. A captain of modern industry recently said that his apprentices, despite their superior advantages, seemed less eager to succeed today than they were forty years ago. Many, he declared, take three years to learn what they used to learn in two. Often, too, there may have been pathetic sacrifices to equip them for their future work. The parents of some "lad of parts" may have educated him by the most self-denying toil. How difficult it was to make both ends meet, so as to send the boy to college! It meant at least

one hand less upon the father's farm, one maid less to help the delicate mother, no luxuries admitted to the shabby home for years! And yet the hands of the youth relaxed, and he seemed to lose his enterprise and zest. "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting."

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend!

It is not a little significant that Dante in his "Purgatorio" takes as his typical example of the sin of sloth the abbot of a monastery. Indeed it is a subtle reminder that the sin in question has characterised the Church as noticeably as the world. And in mediæval days there can be no doubt that the most insidious temptation of the cloister was mental and spiritual *accidia.* The fierce invective of Erasmus makes this clear: "A monk's holy obedience consists in what? In leading an honest, chaste, and sober life?

Not the least. In acquiring learning in study and industry? Still less. A monk may be a glutton, a drunkard . . . but he has broken no vow: he is within his holy obedience. He has only to be the slave of a superior as good for nothing as himself, and he is an excellent brother." Gustave Doré's picture, entitled "The Novice," is not overdrawn. It depicts a youth with the light of genius in his face, finding himself for the first time in the company of those who are to be his lifelong associates in a monastery. At the line of limp and soulless figures, who manifestly have lost all vestiges of inspiration and almost of intellect, he is casting terrified glances. And the entire tragedy of the unfortunate youth's future may be read in these pregnant glances.

Spiritual sloth may to-day have covered its tonsure and and changed its garb. But in essence it is with us still—the paralysis of

soul in which all effort after sacred things has utterly broken down. Confronted by meaningless conventions, or disgusted by flagrant inconsistencies on the part of people who lay claim to special virtue, the youth —inconsistent too—sometimes gives up all striving after spiritual ends. Wrapped in luxury, the epicure becomes a victim of *ennui,* and his spiritual nature grows torpid and effete. One may see the condition of *accidia* even with those who have become satisfied and confident as to spiritual realities. When a man becomes quite sure of a thing, he is apt to tie it up and lay it in a pigeonhole aside. So, having become gospel-hardened, the once busy toiler in Church and Sunday School may grow callous and unresponsive to the summons of his Master, which used to move and thrill him; and the service which is perfect freedom loses its fascination and its joy. It is peri-

lous to become familiar with the wrong. But in some ways it is even more perilous to become familiar with the right and the true —so familiar that we drop our hands in cold indifference, and the right and true become bereft of their spell, their enticement, their charm.

While Dante's pilgrims are groping upon the terrace of Sloth, they are suddenly aroused by the rush of loud and active life. It is the penitents who are sweeping past; and Dante's companion, Virgil, begs them to tell him the best way to manage his ascent. One of the penitents answers, quite out of breath, "Come behind me," and explains that he cannot stop to talk. It is a skilfully arranged episode in the great poem. St. Thomas Aquinas gives, as one of the surest signs of the sin of sloth, talkativeness —gossip—with the passerby. The indifferent man will always throw down his tools

for a discussion with a bystander. But the busy man ever presses on. The eager spirit cannot be deflected from a noble aim by any interruption upon the way. And so to counteract *accidia,* we must bring into the concerns of the soul the rush of busy life. No faculty can be kept healthy and vigorous without exercise. There is nothing mysterious or inexplicable about the torpor and decadence of a soul. It is the natural and inexorable result of *accidia*—spiritual sloth. "What did so-and-so die of?" one was asked. "Doing nothing," came the reply. "That is enough to kill any man," the questioner sagaciously concluded.

What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
Sure, He that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To rust in us unused.

Sloth

It is told of one who had been neglecting the weekly ordinances of religion that his minister called, went over to the fireplace, and removing a live coal, placed it on the hearth and silently stood watching until it turned from a ruddy glow to a dull black mass. Whereupon the man broke in, "I know. Say no more. Next Sunday will find me in God's House."

Time is passing. We must take warning and make an end of spiritual sloth. Old stories tell how death and a man once concluded a tragic bargain. The man stipulated that, lest he be taken unawares, death should first send him so many warnings before he came. Then years later, the king of terrors stood one night before him, to his complete surprise. "Ah!" cried the man, "you have broken your solemn bargain. You have sent me no warnings." "No warnings?" responded death. "Your eyes

are dim. Your ears are dull. Your gums are toothless. Your hair is thin; and tonight it falls like snowflakes across your furrowed brow. No warnings? These are my warnings; and you have allowed them to come to you in vain!"

V: AVARICE

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WHEN Dante's pilgrims climbed to the fifth terrace upon the purgatorial mountain—that of Avarice—they discovered a group of penitents stretched face downwards on the ground, repeating with such profound sighs that one could scarcely make out what they were saying, the Psalmist's words: "My soul cleaveth to the dust." It is a vivid presentation of the inevitable recoil of avarice upon the moral and spiritual nature. One is reminded of the masterpiece of G. F. Watts—the rich young ruler who has made the Great Refusal, retreating from our Lord with stooping shoulders and down-bent head. "He was sad at that saying and went away grieved; for he had great possessions."

Young Himself, Jesus as He looked upon this ruler, loved him and visibly shrank from shattering the fairy castle of his dreams. No alternative, however, remained, and the crestfallen lad sorrowfully went away. Some think that at last he found his *summum bonum* and became the man we now know in Scripture as Lazarus. But at all events, in his dejected figure we can read—alas, too well,—the irrevocable doom of a soul which, for greed of material gain, sells its Christ. Dante, wandering with Virgil through the Inferno, comes upon this young man still searching for his lost opportunity, but in vain. He is the Hamlet of the New Testament, standing midway between his conscience and his task; and his indecision slew him. He knew more than he could do.

From the interview of Christ with this high-born youth, much that is mistaken has been inferred respecting the ideal of uni-

versal Christian duty. St. Anthony, the hermit, who only possessed his clothing, read the command: "Sell all that thou hast," and thereupon sold even it, keeping only a sheepskin and a shirt of hair; and thenceforward he lived on bread and water in the desert. And the great mendicant Orders of St. Francis and St. Dominic, which set forth to carry the ideal of poverty into practice, arose out of the same command. It may be granted that the possession of wealth is fraught with tragic dangers. Professor James has said: "When one sees the way in which wealth-getting enters as an ideal into the very bone and marrow of our generation, one wonders whether a revival of the belief that poverty is a worthy religious vocation may not be the reform which our time stands most in need of. Among us English-speaking peoples especially do the praises of poverty need once more to be sung."

At the same time, nothing makes Christian teaching more pointless than the denunciation of money in itself. The young ruler presented a special problem, and our Lord prescribed for him a special and drastic remedy. A careful study of his character shows that he could only be made poor in spirit by being made poor in everything else. He did not own his riches: they really owned him. Jesus must wake him to much more momentous needs. But we have no right to reason from this particular case to a general ethical principle. Side by side with the solemn warnings of Christ regarding covetousness, stand many utterances in which He speaks of money as a talent to be made use of, both for the advantage of its possessor and for the blessing of mankind. Money is the universal symbol of the product of human toil; and it is only the soiled hands of men that soil it, as Robert Louis

Stevenson aptly said. And everybody knows that, without some measure at least of this world's means, a man's character would lack many possibilities of refinement, and his impulses towards generosity and beneficence would wither and starve.

From the diligent acquisition of money, however, avarice is to be carefully distinguished.

> Gather gear by every wile
> That's justified by honour.

But when wealth becomes transformed from a means into an end—when it disputes the very claim of God to the allegiance of man's heart—then avarice results. No more sordid vice can degrade the human spirit. "Covetousness which is idolatry," frankly says St. Paul; and writing to youthful Timothy, he adds: "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." Many a bloody

war has been produced by it; and there seems little doubt that the gigantic and sanguinary conflict in which the world was recently involved had its origin in Teutonic lust for the territories and hard-won possessions of other peoples. In order to gratify this avaricious lust, the peace of the world was broken, thousands of innocent lives were sacrificed, and numberless unoffending persons were rendered homeless and destitute. "They that *will* be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."

The perils of avarice are frequently illustrated in our daily life, and by no means exclusively among the rich. Indeed a deeper vein of covetousness may sometimes lurk beneath a hodman's jacket than beneath the ermine of a peer. The love of money may cause the prosperous merchant to adulterate

food and even medicine, and to grind the faces of the poor; but it may also tempt the clerk to rob his employer for the sake of a paltry shilling, and the artisan to defraud his master for an equally trifling gain. For thirty pieces of silver, Judas sold his Lord; and the price represented but a few shillings in our money. And there are money-loving Judases still, who will sacrifice human well-being without scruple to equally trifling private gain. Ruskin said: "We do great injustice to Judas Iscariot when we think him wicked above all common wickedness. He was only a common money-lover, and like all money-lovers the world over, didn't understand Christ, couldn't make out the worth of Him or the meaning of Him. Now this is the money-lover's idea the world over. He doesn't hate Christ, but can't understand Him, doesn't care for Him, sees no good in that benevolent business, makes

his own little job out of it, come what will." Take the plumber who, to get an extra profit, covers defectively a house-drain. Soon afterwards, the child of the family falls ill with diphtheria and dies. Is the brand of avarice not upon that plumber? Or take the workman who finds in a casting, intended for a steamer, a gap as large as his hand. He takes a piece of cold iron, heats it, hammers it into the gap, smooths over the surface, and thus saves the many pounds it would cost to reject the piece and cast a new one. The steamer proceeds to carry across the sea many precious lives, and it carries them on the security of that faulty casting. Can the workman and the money-loving foreman who passed that job to save expense, evade the brand of avarice?

Such covetousness becomes peculiarly revolting when it is disguised beneath a veneer of piety, as with a miscreant who declined to

read Monday's newspaper because it was printed on Sunday. This was the kind of character that Tennyson drew in "Sea Dreams"—

> . . . with the fat affectionate smile
> That makes the widow lean.
> . . . . . .
> Who, never naming God except for gain,
> So never took that useful name in vain,
> Made Him his catspaw and the Cross his tool,
> And Christ the bait to trap his dupe and fool.

There have been writers who have contended that the sin of avarice is incurable. Dante says:

> Accurst be thou,
> Inveterate wolf, whose gorge ingluts more prey
> Than every beast beside, yet is not filled,
> So bottomless thy maw.

Still, the grace of God is omnipotent, and the divine Physician knows no hopeless cases. Neither can it be too strongly em-

phasised that money is not an end but a *means* for the fuller development of character and for the service of mankind. Then to eradicate the deadly sin of avarice, the solemn words of Proverbs must be strongly kept in view: "Riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." In such a transient refuge, none can find lasting peace. A traveller lost his way in the desert. On the point of dying from hunger, he espied a bag which some other traveller had evidently dropped. With feverish eagerness he seized it. Was it, maybe, full of nuts? It was only full of pearls. Each pearl was of kingly value; but how greedily would he have exchanged that bag of pearls for a handful of common nuts! To all an hour approaches when riches cannot avail. "Ah, Davie," said Dr. Johnson to his friend Garrick, pointing to the signs of luxury around them, "these are

the things which make death terrible." And terrible they make it, where our Lord's command has not been obeyed: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

VI: GLUTTONY

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AS Dante and his fellow-pilgrims walked along the sixth terrace of the purgatorial mountain—that of Gluttony—they came upon two great trees. These were the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life. The river of the Water of Life fell from above upon their leaves; and from within their foliage voices were heard, proclaiming the doom of greed, and historical and scriptural examples of the beauty of temperance. A crowd of emaciated penitents were listening to the voices with reverent and quiet mien, their attitude plainly demonstrating how thoroughly the deadly sin of gluttony was being purged away. For nothing is more inconsistent with thoughtfulness and devotion than excess in meat and drink.

It is an indication of the way in which man is "working out the beast" that gluttony is not in modern times a very clamant or deadly sin. In "By an Evolutionist," Tennyson quaintly says:

The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man,
And the man said, "Am I your debtor?"
And the Lord—"Not yet: but make it as clean as you can,
And then I will let you a better."

So far as food is concerned, man keeps the house of his body cleaner to-day than in less civilised times; and God is "letting him a better." But gluttony was once a coarse and prevalent evil—"the reeling Faun, the sensual feast." His supply of food being uncertain, the savage was wont to fill himself to repletion when he got the chance, amazing us by his dietary powers. And writers like Tacitus and Sallust make it clear

that in ancient Rome excessive banqueting was frequently indulged in, even by the wealthy and leisured classes. Tacitus tells how, at one extreme of society, thousands of beggars would tremble on the brink of starvation, should a corn ship from Alexandria be delayed; while, at the opposite extreme, Roman nobles would spend a fortune on a single banquet, their ladies wearing robes covered with emeralds and pearls:

Wealth a monster gorged, 'mid starving populations.

The satires of Erasmus also prove how besetting and widespread was this sin, among the cloisters of mediæval days. A more wearisome place than the old-time monastery it is impossible to conceive. And the monks were only too easily tempted to vary its monotony by the periodical diversion afforded to them by the refectory, and to regale themselves not wisely but too well.

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There is a picture of a monk, so arranged that at a distance it seems as if his lectionary and prayerbook lay open on the table before him. But a closer view proves what is really before him to be his platter and winecup. Of many a mediæval monk, the picture was painfully true. Shrouded in cloistered secrecy, and thought to be absorbed in sacred study and prayer, he was really the victim of gluttony, and sometimes of sins which were grosser still. The minute directions as to diet and daily conduct, which were supplied by contemporary moralists, throw a lurid light upon the conditions prevalent in the Religious Houses of the Middle Ages.

While gluttony cannot be described as a widespread modern sin, a writer of repute has taken leave to say: "It is a moot point whether more life is destroyed by excessive drinking or by excessive eating." And Sydney Smith wrote: "According to my

own computation, I have eaten and drunk, between my seventh and my seventieth birthday, forty-four wagon loads more than was good for me." At all events, it is never superfluous to plead for the "golden mean" with regard to the use of food. "Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee." The Roman soldier fought his battles and built his roads, sustained by coarse brown bread and a little sour wine. The Spanish peasant will work all day and dance half the night, upon black bread, onions, and watermelons. The Smyrna porter will carry surprisingly heavy loads all day, upon a little fruit and olives; as will the coolie dieted on rice. One remembers too that "plain living and high thinking" have very frequently gone together. Sir Isaac Newton made some of his greatest discoveries on the simplest fare. The world's greatest work is not generally done

by its largest eaters. "Let your moderation be known unto all men." "Put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite."

There can be little doubt that the race is rising above the sin of gluttony, with respect to the appetite of hunger. Has there been a corresponding rise with respect to the appetite of thirst? It is easy to become intemperate even concerning temperance. But we must face the fact that the consumption of alcohol in Britain increased, during the nineteenth century, by twenty-five per cent per head of the population; while the same thing was true of other nations, and of some of the native races also. And we must face the fact that Britain spends as much in a single year on alcohol as she spent on Foreign Missions during the whole of the nineteenth century. And we must face the fact that three-fourths of our insanity and

crime are traceable to this source. Well may Shakespeare, in one of his surprisingly frequent allusions to this matter, cause Cassio, Othello's lieutenant, to say: "I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment. . . . O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!"

In the use of alcohol, every man must be fully persuaded in his own mind. That most spiritual of teachers, Dr. John Pulsford, said: "Temperance is greater than abstinence. To ride the beast requires more skill than to starve or kill him. . . . What nobler sight is there upon earth than a man cheerfully sharing in outward good, and yet manfully controlling himself in the use of it?" Yet such self-control is clearly not possible for all; and to help them, many have decided to abstain altogether. They take their guidance from the words of St.

Paul: "I will not destroy with my meat him for whom Christ died." We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Sydney Smith, who once tried the experiment of abstinence, wrote: "Let me state some of the good arising from abstaining from fermented liquors. First, sweet sleep: having never known what sweet sleep was, I sleep like a baby or a ploughboy. If I wake, no needless terrors, no black visions of life, but pleasing hopes and pleasing recollections. If I dream, it is not of lions and tigers, but of Easter dues and tithes. . . . My understanding is improved. I comprehend political economy. Only one evil comes from it. I am in such extravagant spirits that I must look for some one who will bore and depress me."

To cure the sin of intemperance, which admittedly wreaks havoc in personal, domes-

tic, and social life, both ameliorative and prohibitive measures have been resorted to, on a wide scale. It should never be forgotten that such intemperance is a deadly sin against God. It defaces God's fairest handiwork, and causes its victim to trail his crown in the mire. It defiles God's temple. "Know ye not," wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians, "that *ye* are the temple of God?" Neither should the solemn words of St. Paul be overlooked: "Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The gradual but inexorable deterioration of character which intemperance brings about is one of the saddest things in the world. A man's self-respect, honesty, affection for friends and even for wife and children may be slowly undermined, until his nature at last comes to resemble a rotten wall, in which no nail will hold.

The most potent cure of all is suggested

by St. Paul's words to the Ephesians: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit." "I cannot break with it," said a slave of alcoholic excess. "No," replied his adviser, "but God's Spirit in you can." And before the saddened wife and barefoot children, they knelt and prayed. The wretch arose, kissed his wife, and declared that the new life had begun. It had. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

VII: SENSUALITY

VII: SENSUALITY

HAVING reached the seventh terrace of Mount Purgatory—that nearest the Garden of Paradise upon the summit—Dante and his fellow-pilgrims emerge upon a very perilous defile. The hillside which slopes up to the Earthly Paradise immediately above, emits a great flame enveloping almost the whole of the terrace, and allowing scarcely room to walk. And in this purifying flame the penitents are being chastened and cleansed. Virgil warns Dante to impose a sedulous watch upon his eyes, since a single false step might mean his destruction. It is manifestly a poetic picture of the way in which the deadly sin of sensuality originates in the realm of imagination and thought, and of how its motions of un-

holy passion must be purified by the sacred fire of God. One recalls Ezekiel's weird and terrifying trance, in the course of which the profanities and excesses of Jewish worship are vividly traced by his dazzling Guide to the people's inward degradation. "Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery?"

The Latin name applied by mediæval writers to the seventh of the Deadly Sins is *luxuria*. The word, however, does not merely indicate what we mean by "luxury." It was employed by the schoolmen as a euphemism for self-indulgence and for the gross and carnal sin of licentiousness and vice. No theme is more difficult to handle. As a rule, the less said of it the better; and the reticence in which it is commonly shrouded is in itself the severest of all pos-

sible condemnations. Even to speak of it is a shame.

Yet reticence ought not to be carried too far. If there is a time to be silent, there is also a time to speak. Perhaps teachers and preachers have been too long tongue-tied by a policy of silence on this matter, when they should have warned young men and women concerning evils which cloud their imaginations, soil their hands, and sap their characters. Ignorance may often give to temptation a cruel advantage; but to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

That the repulsive and carnal sin of licentiousness in its many forms centres in the thought and the imagination is one of the most prominent themes in the Book of Proverbs—the young man's *vade mecum*—and it is also one of the plainest and most frequently reiterated of the ethical teachings

of Jesus. When youthful feet are on the fender and the hour is late, licentious words may be spoken, in defiance of chastity and self-respect. When coarse and unscrupulous men find themselves in situations in which the restraints of social decency and purity may be flung off with impunity, licentious acts may be committed in utter disregard of the dictates of humanity. But the fountain of all such words and acts is in the thought. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Physiology would state it thus. In the substance of the brain, channels become dug which gradually make the course of the evil current easier, until self-control is lost and the life grows to be a pandemonium of vice. But Jesus states it in language which is more terrible still. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which de-

file a man." Thought *is* action; and the polluted current of word and deed must flow from the spring of defiled imagination and polluted mind and heart.

The very size and majesty of a ship bury the sunken rock more deeply in her prow; and the corruption of the best is the worst. God has bestowed on man no fairer and nobler gift than imagination. But this divine gift is open to tragic perils. Nothing indeed might seem so fragile and insubstantial; yet nothing is really so creative and enduring. The products of imagination outlast dynasties; and the tides which fret away the rocks are powerless against these imperishable wonders. Mediævalism is gone; but Raphael, Murillo, Angelico still hold us by their imaginations. Milton, Bunyan, Dante still rule us from their urns. And we can still see how the stupendous imaginations of men of former days worked

out noble institutions, and stately domes and spires.

But this "hall of fantasy"—in Nathaniel Hawthorne's striking phrase—may be shockingly polluted. So far from being hung with fancies beautiful and pure—like the cell of Fra Angelico, whose walls were covered with seraphs' faces and angels' wings—they may harbour thoughts of licence and shame. And nothing contributes to create such thoughts more potently than the defiled pictures and the tainted and "suggestive" books which are thrust upon the notice of young people to-day. A shop in one of our cities went so far as to announce in its window that it had, inside, pictures it could not openly display! And not only are there quantities of harmful books issued and circulated to-day, but in stories which are apparently decent there is an element of libertinism frequently insinuated,

which works havoc in youthful minds and consciences. One of the originators of this type of "literature" was Zola. Capable of splendid work, he prostituted his powers. He gathered from the refuse of life much that was contemptible and set it to seethe, until it sent forth poisonous vapours to suffocate the higher potentialities of man. And Nature exacted a grim penalty and took a startling revenge upon him. As Zola asphyxiated his readers, so Nature asphyxiated him. He died of suffocation. It was one of those ironies which we do not easily forget.

To cure the deadly sin of sensuality, it should always be emphasised that God has endowed man with freedom of will, and power to choose the right, pure, and clean. Licentious appetites frequently advance the plea that, after all, a man "must obey his instincts" and "have his fling." His "natu-

ral desires," being part of his equipment, require to be indulged. Such desires, however, must always be held in subjection to the supremacy of will, "the toughest sinew in creation." To say that one must necessarily yield to his natural impulses without restraint, reduces man to the level of the beast. It would be as reasonable to say that the furnaces of a steamer, having been fed to their utmost, should be left to drive the vessel whithersoever they may. If men "must have their fling," another "must" will insist on coming into play, and they must reap as they have sown. The grim words of the Book of Job will be fulfilled: "His bones are full of the iniquity of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the grave."

Further, there is no defence against sensuality more effective than the positive preoccupation of mind and heart with fair and noble themes. Martin Luther used to say:

"You cannot cleanse a stable with spades and brooms. Turn the Elbe into it." So if one lets in the rush of a new passion for the right and true, one will conquer by displacement and replacement; and the evils which he laments will be swept away. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Dr. Chalmers coined a suggestive phrase: "The expulsive power of a new affection," and it is said that the following incident brought it to his mind. He was driving, one day, on a pastoral errand, and at a certain point on the road, his "man" drew the whip and gave the pony a sharp cut. Chalmers remonstrated. The driver said: "Do you see that white post? The pony has a way of shying at it; so when we approach it, I always give him a touch of the whip, to let him have something else to think about." In exchange for the passion of self-indul-

gence, we can always find deliverance and peace in the passion of a new affection for Him who yearns to draw all men to Himself.

St. Paul loved to speak of Christ as "the Image of God." May we not think the apostle meant that Christ was God's appeal to our imagination? When the illumination of His presence floods our minds and hearts, all the dark and polluted shapes must disappear. With His glorious reality, no foul thing can coexist. Nothing can keep mind, heart, and imagination so free from sensual taint as the knowledge and love of Him who is "the brightness of God's glory and the express Image of His person."

THE END

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